RESEARCH

Cariboo Forest Region

- Making Research Work For You -

EXTENSION NOTE #21
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Herbarium

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The need to accurately identify plants as part of good forest management practices is constantly increasing. Recommendations in many of the Forest Practices Code guidebooks require forest and range resource managers to accurately identify plants and vegetation communities as a basis for developing ecologically based management practices. A few examples of these include:

- the riparian management area guidebook uses obligate hydrophytic vegetation in defining what is a wetland
- the silviculture prescriptions guidebook requires that sites be ecologically stratified to site series (assisted by the identification of key plants) as part of the process of developing silviculture prescriptions
- the range management guidebook requires the identification and recording of existing plant communities and potential natural communities (PNC's), or desired plant communities (DPC's) in range use plans

A herbarium is a collection of dried plant specimens that can greatly assist in plant identification by providing examples of known species against which to compare unidentified specimens. Specimens in a herbarium are systematically arranged and housed in such a manner as to make them easily retrievable. Within the Cariboo Forest Region there are six such collections. A small herbarium is located in each district and a larger one is located at the Regional office. Each of the district herbaria contain specimens of plants listed in *A Field Guide for Identification and Interpretation of Ecosystems of the Cariboo Forest Region (Ministry of Forests, 1982)*. The district herbaria have been installed to assist field staff in identifying site units and site indicator species. Each specimen in these collections is mounted in a folder which also contains a brief description of important field characteristics for identifying the species as well as some of its indicator properties. In some districts these herbaria have been added to by district staff to assist in the identification of a broader spectrum of species, such as noxious weeds and grassland and wetland species.

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Although it is the responsibility of the districts to maintain and add to these herbaria, assistance in expanding the district herbaria is available from the Research Section. The process of adding additional specimens to the district herbaria is relatively simple and inexpensive.

The Cariboo Forest Region Herbarium (given the acronym WL in the international listing of herbaria) contains approximately 5,000 specimens. This herbarium also includes smaller collections of bryophytes (mosses and liverworts), lichens and fungi. Initiated in 1975, it is one of the largest herbaria in the B.C. Interior. Many of its specimens were collected as voucher specimens for the ecological classification project (EP822.4). Voucher specimens are used to verify the identity of species recorded in ecological plot data. Other specimens were collected to represent to the fullest extent possible the flora of the Region. Anna Roberts, formerly with the Research Section, is largely responsible for many of these collections as well as for having provided the identification of many specimens in the herbarium.

The regional herbarium supports the research ecologists when providing plant identification assistance to field staff. It has also been used extensively by research staff in developing identification keys and other identification aids to difficult groups of plants such as willows and sedges. Site information collected with each specimen has provided insight into the distribution of species and is helping to increase the knowledge about the indicator values of several species.

Plant specimens from the regional herbarium are periodically loaned to plant taxonomists from throughout North America in support of their research. The regional herbarium also assists the Conservation Data Centre in identifying and tracking rare and endangered plants.

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Cornus canadensis